



March 10, 2016

Chairman Ehli and members of the committee,

For the record my name is Sylvia Danforth and I am the current chair of the Montana Lifespan Respite coalition. The Coalition's more than 60 members are a diverse group of individuals representing caregivers, not for profit and private providers, state agencies and others interested in improving the quality of life of family caregivers who need a break from the demands of caregiving.

The Children, Families, Health and Human Services Interim Committee has been learning more about aging services, Alzheimer's Disease and the essential needs of our growing population of elderly citizens. I know you are interested in information on the many services and supports available to people of all ages living in Montana. Montana caregivers provide over 110 million hours of care at an estimated value of over \$1.4 billion annually, as identified in the AARP "Valuing the Invaluable: 2015 Update." The need for respite care services continues to grow for caregivers of individuals with special care needs across the lifespan.

The Lifespan Respite Coalition in collaboration with DPHHS just completed a one day summit with the theme "Riding the Respite Wave: Sustaining the Momentum" where over 80 people including family caregivers, coalition members, respite providers and other stakeholders collaborated in learning how to best advocate for caregivers and how to support sustainable respite services that meet the needs of all Montana caregivers.

The Lifespan Respite Coalition tag line is "It's OK to need it, it's OK to want it and it's OK to get it" to support caregivers in asking for caregiver support for them to get "relief", to get a break." The current Lifespan Respite federal grant provides funding through 2017 including limited funds to be spent on respite care. A sliding fee cost share online voucher system is available to Montana caregivers no matter where they live. Launched in July of 2015, the voucher program provides limited financial support for unpaid family caregivers to get a short break from caregiving responsibilities.

At the end of February, the respite voucher program had distributed 133 applications from caregivers across Montana, had awarded 74 vouchers and using a cost share reimbursement had allocated \$27,000 with only \$1706 unallocated funds through the end of August 2016. Caregivers utilizing the voucher funding include great grandparents and grandparents raising grandchildren, veterans and other caregivers ranging in age from 23 to 87.

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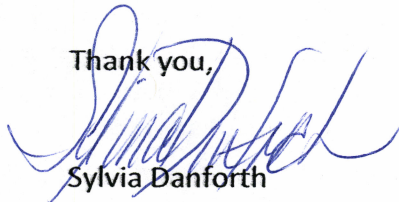
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The Lifespan Respite Coalition has worked hard to create a statewide infrastructure and to develop resources that promote and provide essential information on Lifespan Respite support services as well as the voucher system for accessing respite funding. However, sustainable funding is essential in assuring that the mission of the program continues when grant funding ends. All caregivers need a break from the constant demands of ongoing care and designated funding for the preventative and cost effective respite services is critical.

Coalition members would be happy to provide additional information on the Lifespan Respite voucher program and other efforts of the coalition to support respite care services in Montana and would welcome meeting with you to share additional information as requested.

Thank you,



Sylvia Danforth

Chair, Lifespan Respite Coalition  
Executive Director, DEAP